

In November 2014, Guyana faced a political crisis. President Donald Ramotar suspended the National Assembly in order to avoid a no-confidence vote. Ramotar's People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) had won the most seats in the 2011 elections but was overtaken by a coalition with a one-seat majority, which caused parliamentary gridlock and weak governance before the suspension. No new elections had been called by year's end.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 30 / 40 (–1) [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

Guyana's 1980 constitution provides for a strong president and a 65-seat National Assembly, with members elected every five years. The president appoints four additional, nonvoting members. The leader of the party with a plurality of parliamentary seats becomes president for a five-year term.

In November 2011 elections, the PPP/C captured 32 seats, while the newly established Partnership For National Unity (APNU) took 26 seats, and the Alliance For Change (AFC) won 7 seats. PPP/C leader Donald Ramotar became president in December. However, the APNU and the AFC formed a ruling coalition with a one-seat majority. A Commonwealth Observer Group noted that, despite some minor issues, the elections represented progress in strengthening Guyana's democratic processes.

The slim ruling majority led to stalemate in the National Assembly, with little legislative progress being made. Some observers noted that President Ramotar's role became limited to being largely ceremonial. This changed when he faced a no-confidence vote and prorogued the legislature in late 2014.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Guyanese politics are dominated by a tense split between descendants of indentured workers from India, known as Indo-Guyanese, who generally back the PPP/C, and Afro-Guyanese, who traditionally supported the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) party. The PNCR grew out of the People's National Congress, which had ruled Guyana autocratically in the quarter century after independence in 1966. Some Guyanese began voting across racial lines, especially since the 2006 elections and the establishment of the multiracial AFC. The PPP/C's victory in 2011 marked its fifth straight win, but the AFC made further gains.

The small indigenous population has some political representation, including a minister of Amerindian affairs.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12 (–1)

In November 2014, President Ramotar suspended the National Assembly to prevent a no-confidence vote.

He was able to do so under his constitutional authority to disband the legislature for up to six months. However, in the absence of a legislature, Ramotar was able to govern alone. The National Assembly remained disbanded at year's end.

Guyana is rife with corruption, and Guyana was ranked 124 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. The country is a transit point for South American cocaine destined for North America and Europe. Counternarcotics efforts are undermined by corruption that reaches high levels of the government. The informal economy is driven primarily by drug proceeds, which may equal between 40 and 60 percent of formal economic activity.

Opposition leaders have called for an anticorruption commission for many years, but little progress has been made. In March 2014, the Organization of American States (OAS) called on Guyana to develop an anticorruption strategy. In 2013, the OAS had recommended the establishment of an articulated anticorruption strategy, better coordination between police and the Office of Public Prosecutions, and more financial and human resource investments in several government oversight bodies. The government's unwillingness to implement or enforce anticorruption laws has resulted in the withdrawal of international banks from Guyana.

Civil Liberties: 41 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Although freedom of the press is generally respected, an uneasy tension between the state and the media persists. Several independent newspapers operate freely, including the daily *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News*. However, non-PPP/C party leaders complain that they lack access to state media. The first private radio station began broadcasting in 2012. Government officials have used libel lawsuits to suppress criticism. In October 2014, *Kaieteur News* published a written transcript of an alleged recorded phone call made by Anil Nandlall, Guyana's attorney general, to one of the paper's senior reporters in which he threatened deadly repercussions if the paper continued its critical reporting of the government.

Guyanese generally enjoy freedom of religion, and the government does not restrict academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

The government largely respects freedoms of assembly and association. While police have shot at political protesters in the past, there were no notable crackdowns in 2014.

The right to form labor unions is generally upheld, and unions are well organized. However, employers are not required to recognize unions in former state enterprises.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judicial system is independent, but due process is undermined by shortages of staff and funds. In 2005, Guyana adopted the Trinidad-based Caribbean Court of Justice as its highest appellate court.

The Guyana Defence Force and the national Guyana Police Force are under civilian control. Prisons are overcrowded, and conditions are poor.

Violent crime continues to rise. Between January and July 2014, 10 percent more murders had occurred than in the same period in the previous year. Armed robberies increased by 16 percent.

Racial polarization has had an impact on law enforcement. Although Afro-Guyanese have historically dominated the police force, they have also raised concerns about police brutality against their population. Corruption among the police is widely reported.

The nine indigenous groups in Guyana face challenges in accessing state resources, especially in education and health care.

“Sodomy” is punishable with a maximum sentence of life in prison, and cross-dressing is criminalized for both men and women. Police routinely intimidate gay men. In January 2014, a man was sodomized by members of the police force.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Violence against women, including domestic abuse, is widespread, with one out of every six women reporting physical abuse in the past year. Rape often goes unreported and is rarely prosecuted. The Guyana Human Rights Association has charged that the legal system’s treatment of victims of sexual violence is intentionally humiliating. The 2010 Sexual Offenses Act makes rape gender-neutral and expanded the definition to include spousal rape and coercion, and child abuse. Guyana permits elective abortion.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)